

D. B. Davy
1793.

A N
E S S A Y

TENDING TO SHEW

In what Sense JESUS CHRIST “hath
brought Life and Immortality to Light
through the Gospel.”

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]

4



A N
E S S A Y

TENDING TO SHEW

IN WHAT SENSE JESUS CHRIST

“HATH BROUGHT LIFE AND IMMORTALITY TO LIGHT
THROUGH THE GOSPEL.”

*Published, in pursuance of the Will of the late Mr. Norris, as having gained
the Annual Prize instituted by him in the University of Cambridge.*

By JOHN SPENCER COBBOLD, A.M.

FELLOW OF GONVILLE AND CAIUS COLLEGE.

—THE LIGHT HIMSELF SHALL SHINE
REVEAL'D.—

Pope.

I P S W I C H :

Printed and Sold by George Jermyn;

GOLD ALSO BY MESS. RIVINGTONS, LONDON; MERRILL AND LUNN,
CAMBRIDGE; LODGE, WOODBRIDGE; PEARSON, NORWICH;
KEYMER, COLCHESTER; GEDGE AND RACKHAM, BURY;
STOW, STOWMARKET; LEATHERDALE, HADLEIGH;
AND BURRELL, NEWMARKET. 1793.



AN

E S S A Y

&c.

IN what sense hath the Gospel brought to light life and immortality?---is a question, which the Jew, as well as the advocate of Natural Religion, would exultingly put; each with a view of aggrandizing his particular system, and of derogating from the claims of Christianity.

It is an enquiry, however, in which the Christian needs not fear to meet them; for there is none, of which the result would be more to his advantage: a comparison of the

information, on the subject of a future state, which was either suggested by Reason, or communicated by previous Revelations, with the clearer manifestation of it by Christianity, will point out to us the superiority of its claims in this respect, and determine the sense in which Christ merited the character ascribed to him by the Apostle.

THE most natural order of enquiry, is, to begin with an investigation of the sentiments of the Gentile world ; Reason having existed prior to Revelation.

IN almost every age and country, traces may be found of the belief of a future state : whether such a notion was originally struck out by the force of natural reason, or arose out of the ruins of primæval tradition, is uncertain, and for the present purpose not interesting to enquire. Human nature shrinks from annihilation, and the idea of immortality needs only to be conceived to be believed.

Men have ever indulged the hope of it, tho' they were ignorant on what grounds, and encouraged the belief of it, though it had but little support except in their own eager expectations.

THE early Ægyptians, we have the concurrent testimony of history to prove, taught the immortality of the soul: but it was a doctrine which the fondness of their hopes rather suggested to their credulity, than the force of argument made evident to their reason. As we descend, however, we find this doctrine become more the subject of rational investigation. The first, who supported it by argument, appears to have been Plato*. To him succeeded a long list of Philosophers, who exerted every effort of Reason to maintain a hope, which Nature encouraged, if not

* Platonem ferunt—primum de animorum æternitate non solum sensisse idem, quod Pythagoran, sed rationes etiam adtulisse. *Cic. Tusc. Disp. lib. i. c. 17.*

suggested. To enumerate every respectable name, in which this doctrine found a patron, would be an endless labour : the slightest acquaintance with profane history will be sufficient to shew, not only that an idea of a future state existed antecedently to the publication of it in the Gospel, but that it made an important part of the contemplations of the most enlightened heathens.

To the advocate of Natural Religion, however, this concession will afford but little cause of triumph. The same page which boasts the hopes of Nature, confesses also her fears ; and the little glimmering which Reason shed, served to discover nothing more clearly, than the necessity of a brighter radiation.

WHAT an air of fable the doctrine of a future state assumed under the management of the Poets, needs not be expatiated on ; and the speculations of the Philosophers, though less fabulous, were not more satisfac-

tory than the fictions of the Poets. However general might be the sentiment, which anticipated a future existence, yet the *reality*, any more than the *mode* of that existence, was not so generally agreed upon, but that the mind was left a prey to considerable suspense and uncertainty. Some general hopes prevailed, but they were no more than hopes; and men no sooner began to *reason*, than they began to grow incredulous. Many, who set out upon subtle metaphysical principles, came at last to disbelieve what they had undertaken to prove; and it was well if, amid the contrariety of opinions which prevailed under the patronage of some great name or other, popular belief did not reject what was so equivocally inculcated.

To dispel these doubts, and to remove these difficulties, was the design of the Gospel. Nature, if it was Nature, had thrown just light enough on the object to confuse it: it was the province of Revelation, by additional

lustre, to render it distinct. The Gospel aspires to this character; and an attention to what it has actually effected, will demonstrate the justness of its pretensions.

THE first instance of this effect is to be met with in the arguments of Natural Religion itself. We hear much of the light of Nature, and the competency of human Reason: but if we allow either of them the merit, which the advocates of each of them demand; on what grounds can we account for that imbecillity, which marks the reasonings of the ancients upon the subject? to what can we ascribe the absurdity of their principles, the feebleness of their arguments, and the uncertainty of their conclusions? to what the comparative clearness and perspicuity of modern reasoners?

It is to be considered, that more men, perhaps, have been enlightened by Christianity, than know it; certainly, more than choose to

acknowledge it. By an habitual acquaintance with the Gospel, its principles have become so incorporated with the sentiments of Nature, to which they are assimilated, that it is difficult to distinguish them. Hence the modern enquirer has the advantage of the ancient: he enters upon his subject with a train of ideas, which he has imperceptibly imbibed; and no wonder if better success is the result of better information. A man who explores a dubious path, will find an easier passage through it by twilight, for having traversed it in open day.

THIS observation applies to Natural Religion in general; the great truths of which have derived a lustre from the Gospel, unknown in the ages of glimmering Philosophy. But the propriety of it is no where more evident, than in the application of it to the point before us. We have already touched upon the uncertainty which characterized the reasonings of the ancients upon this subject, and

shall have further occasion, in the course of what follows, to advert to the same topic:— for the superior strength and perspicuity of the moderns, we must refer to their productions.

THE arguments of Natural Religion, then, so far from superseding the utility of the Gospel, afford strong proof of that utility: they reflect a brightness borrowed from the evangelical source; and we should as rationally infer the inutility of the Sun, from the light afforded by the Moon, as make the arguments of Reason a ground for rejecting the assistance of Revelation.

THE evidences of Nature, however, under all these advantages of *borrowed* influence, do not illustrate the object with that clearness which it derives from *direct* scriptural evidences; in the same manner as, in the natural world, reflected light operates more feebly, than light immediately emitted from the radiating substance. They afford, at best, but

a sort of uncertain surmise of a future existence, while the *manner*, *duration*, and many other particulars, together with the *certainty* of any existence at all, are matters, which, as they lie beyond the reach of Reason, can only be discovered by Revelation.

THE Gospel has undertaken to illustrate these points, and it is not the least recommendation of the articles, which it proposes to our belief, that Reason *approves* the divine methods, which yet she was incompetent to *discover*.

THE first obscure point, on which the Gospel has immediately reflected perspicuity, is, the doctrine of a *future retribution*. The belief, in which men more generally met in the most enlightened ages of Heathenism, was that of the soul's surviving the dissolution of the body. The doctrine of a future retribution was either utterly rejected, or assented to with caution. The want of distributive

justice in the affairs of the present world inclined them to hope for an adjustment in a future one; but these hopes vanished, when brought to the test of Philosophical enquiry. The fact was, their doctrine of the soul's *permanency* was founded on metaphysical principles, which were destructive of a *future retribution*; and it was their misfortune to be governed more by metaphysical arguments, than moral evidences.

IT was a principle of the ancient * Philosophy, that the soul was self-existent: so that, antecedently to Christianity, it was rare to find any one, who maintained the soul's immortality *a parte post*, who did not likewise assent to its eternity *a parte ante*.

THIS belief, at first view, disposed men to hesitate concerning the reality of a future *retribution*; and, if pursued to its just con-

* *Plat. Phæd. Cic. 1 Tusc. c 24. 32. 33.*

sequences, led to a conclusion, which was utterly subversive of it. If the soul existed from all eternity, they saw no other alternative, but that it must be either independent of God, or part of his substance; independent of him they maintained it could not be, and † therefore easily concluded it was part of his substance, into which it would be resolved upon the dissolution of the body. Upon these grounds, the idea of a future retribution was absurd, not to say, impious.

THUS the arguments, which men used to support a future existence, overthrew a future retribution. On the other hand, a future retribution was maintained on principles subversive of a future existence; for the qualities, which they attributed to the soul, forbid the

† A naturâ Deorum, ut doctissimis sapientissimisque placuit, haustos animos et libatos habemus. *Cic. De Divin.* lib. i. c. 49.

Animus Deus est, si quidem Deus est, qui viget, qui sentit, &c. *Som. Scip.* c. 8.

expectation of future reward and punishment; while the belief of the latter, in the opinion of Philosophers, not unfrequently excluded the immateriality of the soul itself.

It was another * principle of the ancient Philosophy, that the Deity was incapable of anger, and could do no harm. This principle, however just in itself, was, like the former, made the instrument of subverting the doctrine of a future retribution, and actually operated much to obstruct the reception of the Gospel which taught it. The primitive Fathers were aware of this, and in their zeal to facilitate the progress of Christianity, ran into the extreme, still less pardonable, of teaching, that the † Deity was possessed of human affections. But it may be objected, that this

* At hoc quidem commune est omnium Philosophorum, nunquam nec irasci Deum, nec nocere. *Cic. Off.* lib. iii. c. 28.

† Vid. *Lactant. De ira Dei.*

notion of the nature of the Deity, concluded only against a future state of *punishment*; for that, while the Philosophers considered the Deity as capable of anger, they yet assigned him a principle of grace, or benevolence, which, without coming under the description of a human passion, left him the full power of conferring future reward. But, whatever may be objected, it concludes against a future judgment considered, as is taught by Christianity, in the light of a *moral designation*; future reward always, in this case, implying future punishment, and both coexisting with the notion of a moral responsibility.

THE simplicity of the Gospel evidences on this subject forms a striking contrast with the complexness of those hammered out on the anvil of Philosophy. The ancients were obliged to prove syllogistically, what the Gospel declares authoritatively. Hence their dearest hopes were made to turn on the success of a metaphysical deduction, and immor-

ality evaporated in a chain of sophisticated Philosophy. The Gospel does not pretend to enter into the merits of their theoretical disputes, but establishes, upon incontrovertible evidence, the truth which was the ultimate object of their researches. It proclaims authoritatively the certainty of a *future life*; and appeals, moreover, to the strongest evidence for a future *retribution*; asserting, that "God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." (Acts xvii. 31.)

To a heart convinced of the reasonableness of the belief of Christianity *in general*, this must be satisfactory evidence of the article of a future state *in particular*. Man must be immortal and accountable, or the Gospel must be false. But, as some may think we ought to proceed upon proofs of a more distinct nature, we will enter more particularly

into this part of the subject, where it may be more seasonably introduced.

THE next circumstance that claims our attention, is, the *duration* of a future state; a point which, whether it respects a simple *existence*, or a state of *retribution*, derives all its light from the Gospel.

IN the Heathen World, men made shrewd *conjectures* of the soul's eternity, but could arrive at no *determinate conclusion*. Indeed it was impossible they should: a matter, so entirely dependent upon the will of the Creator, could not be ascertained but by an express revelation. Men, from its observable properties, inferred the *immateriality* of the soul, but the evidences were not so strong in favour of its *eternity*: the necessity of the latter could never be deduced from the *certainty*, much less from the *probability* of the former. Immaterial beings, as well as material, may, for aught reason can object, contain the seeds of natural

dissolution, or God, by his immediate authority, might put a period to their existence; when they had served the purposes, for which they were created.

THE duration of a future state of *retribution* is a circumstance, which must have been involved in still greater obscurity, antecedently to the illustration of it in the Gospel. Men might, and *did*, by the help of their natural faculties, collect, that "God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him;" but what was the particular nature of these rewards, or how long was to be their duration, natural reason could not discover. It was reasonable enough to hope, from a knowledge of the nature of the bestower of them, that they were *abundant*; that they were *eternal*, reason could not whisper, nor vanity presume to hope. What proportion is there between an imperfect obedience of momentary duration, and a compensation of eternal felicity? Doubtless the gift of endless happiness is only to be

resolved into the unfathomable goodness of the giver; and therefore, not having its foundation in human reason, is not to be known but by divine revelation. The Gospel is that revelation; it proclaims by the mouth of Christ himself, that “the wicked shall go away into *everlasting* punishment, but the righteous into life *eternal*.” (Matth. xxv. 46.)

BUT the Gospel not only expresses itself in promises of immortality; it explains the nature and extent of man's title to the performance of those promises. The only title to the gift of immortality, as promised in the Gospel, is the blood of a redeemer. To redeem is, properly, to *re-purchase*. Redemption, therefore, implies a previous loss; and as the Jews were the only people acquainted with the loss, they alone were qualified to anticipate the means of a recovery. But, on what grounds could they hope for a restoration of the forfeited blessing *at all*? or, if desire engendered

hope, what means could they presume would be conciliatory of divine mercy? or what terms could they be assured would be satisfactory to divine justice? Immortality was, originally, *a free gift, conditionally bestowed: but, if a free gift is forfeited by breach of condition, the bestower is at liberty to re-propose the terms on which he will restore it; or to choose, whether, or not, he will restore it at all. Natural reason, therefore, not being competent to the discovery of a matter vested in arbitrary discretion; restoration to forfeited immortality, and the *means* of restoration could not be known, but by revelation. The Gospel reveals these means, in the History of a Blessed Redeemer, “who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” (Rom. iv. 25.)

BUT, besides the *means* of *recovering* a lost blessing, the Gospel reveals the *condition* o

* Rom. v. 15.

participating the benefits of it recovered. For distinction is to be made between the recovery of immortality, and the enjoyment of the benefits annexed to that recovery : the former extends to all mankind ; the latter is the lot of those only, who comply with the condition revealed : the blood of a Redeemer was the *means* of the first ; faith in that blood is the *condition* of the second. As the *means* were not to be ascertained by the light of Nature ; so the *condition* could not have been discovered but by Revelation.

THE power of restoring the penitent to God's *indefinite* favour, is all the efficacy that natural Reason could have attributed to repentance ; which, as it could not have insured the *recovery* of a particular free gift, so much less could it have secured the *benefits of it when recovered.* God was pleased to make the observance of a positive command the condition of immortality, as *bestowed* under the first dispensation : and he was free

to annex the observance of a similar command to the *enjoyment of the benefits* of it as *recovered* under the second. What that condition was, which was of too arbitrary a nature for human reason to discover, is ascertained by the Gospel to be *faith*---and *faith alone*. * “Therefore we conclude,” says St. Paul, “that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law,” or works. “But does he then make void the law thro’ faith? God forbid! yea, he establishes the law.” It may, at first, be difficult to see, how he establishes the law, and the difficulty will not be removed by adverting to the words of St. James, who declares, that † “faith without works is dead,” and concludes, that “by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”

THE inconsistency seems to turn upon a misapprehension of the meaning of St. Paul.

* Rom. iii. 28—31. † James ii. 20—24.

It is one thing, to say, that "a man is justified by faith, without works;" and another, to say, that "a man without works, is justified by faith." The former proposition is negative, and excludes only the *intrinsic merit* of works: the latter is affirmative, and excludes the *absolute necessity* of them. St. Paul does not dispense with the performance of works; nor does St. James contend for their unqualified efficacy. In this, they are not only consistent with each other, but with the whole tenor of the New Testament. Works could only entitle the performer to God's *indefinite* favor: Faith, through the gracious promise of God, entitled him to that specific reward, of which itself was the condition. Faith without works, as St. James observed, is dead; but works without faith, as to any *benefit* resulting from recovered immortality, are dead also: works owe their imputed value to faith, and faith cannot impute merit, but where, at the same time, there exist works, Faith then, as revealed

in the Gospel, is the *condition* of participating the benefits of that immortality, which the death and passion of a Redeemer is the *means* of recovering, equally to believers, and unbelievers.

BUT it was not sufficient merely to reveal the *means* of recovering immortality, or the *condition* of reaping the benefit of it when recovered. The Gospel promises the co-operation of the Holy Spirit, to assist in the attainment of the ends which it proposes. "This" says the Apostle, "Jesus spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." (John vii. 39.) Antecedently to Christianity, the Holy Ghost was not *generally* dispensed; subsequently to that period, the natural faculties of man have been strengthened by divine assistance; and eternal *happiness*, which by the Gospel, was made the discoverable object of human knowledge, is, by the Gospel,

made the attainable object of human pursuit.

BUT the article, which is most indebted to the Gospel of Christ for the light derived upon it, is the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. This was a matter, so inexplicable upon every principle of reason, or experience, that it could never enter the mind of the philosophizing heathen, and, if proposed to his belief, could not but disgust him. To conceive a resuscitation of the body from the confused embers of the funeral pile, was a thing so apparently absurd, that * some of the ancients have even ventured to declare it to be beyond the power of God himself.

* Particularly Pliny: his words are—*Imperfectæ vero in homine naturæ præcipua solatia sunt, ne Deum quidem posse omnia: nam neque sibi potest mortem consciscere, si velit—nec mortales æternitate donare, nec revocare defunctos.*
N.H., L.H. c. 7.

INDEED † they excluded the body from making part of the man, and ‡ considered it as a prison, into which the soul was thrust, and from which the latter would escape upon the dissolution of the former.

ON the other hand, vulgar apprehension, inadequate to the refined conceptions of the learned, eagerly embraced the carnal expectations of Poetic fiction. * An unbodied spirit was an abstract idea, of which the multitude could form no conception: they therefore entertained the same idea of a man after death as before §, and quitted *this* world, with an expectation of finding, in the Elysium of the *next*, a continuation of the pursuits, which had occupied them in their bodily existence.

THE Gospel at once rectifies the refinement of philosophic investigation, and the grossness

† *Cic. Som. Scip.* c. 8. ‡ *Cic. De amicis.* c. 4.

* *Cic. Tusc. Disp.* lib. i. c. 16. § *Ibid.*

of popular credulity; declaring, that "the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (Cor. xv. 52.)

It were, however, to little purpose, to be informed of the *existence*, or to be instructed in the *nature* of a future state, without being assured of the *certainty* of it. The proper measure of the light derived from the Gospel, is the superiority of confidence which it inspires; and the superiority of confidence will depend on the superior strength of its credentials for the truth of what it says. Plausible hypotheses were invented by the Heathens, which, however, left the matter still involved in obscurity; and the subject would have been but little enlightened, if the Gospel added to their hypotheses, without giving greater security to their hopes.

THE sublimest conceptions of antiquity were rather monuments of human ingenuity,

than a standard of belief on which men could repose with confidence: fallibility was opposed to fallibility; and, while the divine sanction was with-held, every speculation ended in obscurity, distrust, and uncertainty.

INDEED not only were the Philosophers at variance with each other, but inconsistent with themselves. Plato, Xenophon, and Cicero all had their moments, when fear seemed to get the better of hope, and reason to distrust her own conclusions. Even Socrates, the great luminary of the heathen world, summed up his arguments with a confession of his doubt respecting their validity. This truth has given rise to the conjecture, that none of the ancient Philosophers *believed* what they *taught* concerning a future state; and much has been written, to prove the existence of a double doctrine, under which they veiled the τα απορρητα της φιλοσοφιας, or truth, while they inculcated such notions in their public lectures, as were most subservient to

the ends of legislation. But, without detracting from the merit of this opinion, their inconsistency might, with some share of truth, be resolved into the uncertainty of reason in a matter, which as one of them has readily confessed, never could be known but by revelation.

THE Gospel is that revelation: to the promise of a future state it adds the divine signature for the performance. Its credentials are of the most unquestionable nature, and inspire a degree of confidence known only to the breast of Christian integrity. Most of the arguments, which *reason* furnishes, are of an abstruse and intricate nature; such as few men have inclination, and fewer still, ability to pursue. They are calculated, rather, to gratify an idle curiosity, than reform a vicious tendency. The despondency of those who maintained them, shews that they excited no hopes, and the complexion of their lives evinces that they alarmed no fears. The Gospel,

on the other hand, affords evidences, which convert a matter of barren speculation into a powerful principle of action. A man may deride the unsubstantial theories of Philosophy ; but, like Felix, he will tremble at the arguments of Christianity. The Gospel pronounces with authority, that "the hour is coming, in which all that are in their graves shall come forth ; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise ; the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." Merciful Lord ! what a day of mingled joy and horror ! and for the accomplishment of what it predicts, the Gospel affords the most unequivocal security.

THE first pledge to this effect is supplied in the representation it gives us of the har-

mony of our Saviour's words and actions. His language was, " my kingdom is not of this world," and the conformity of his conduct to this principle, is seen in the indifference he manifested to all worldly comforts, and the dignity and fortitude with which he suffered the extremity of human misery. What could induce him to end a life of unremitting toil and indigence by a foreseen death of ignominy, but a full persuasion of the truth of that immortality, which had been the subject of his promises ? Can we impute his conduct to ambition ?---The miracle, which he wrought to escape the proffered honors of his friends, acquits him of the charge. Can we impute it to enthusiasm ?---his very enemies must allow that he spoke at least the " words of soberness."

It is an additional argument for the accomplishment of what the Gospel promises, that for the truth of the most important article, it appeals to facts of the plainest nature

and greatest notoriety. How can it be thought a thing incredible, that Christ should raise the dead, when he exhibits to our view the widow's son and Lazarus revived; and on the event of his own resurrection, rests the resurrection of his followers? "If Christ be preached," as St. Paul says, that he rose from the dead, how say some among you, that there is no resurrection of the dead?" "Surely," we might add, "he, who died for our sins, cannot want *will* to raise us, nor he, who himself arose for our justification, want *power* to raise us."

If we take into the account the constancy and unshaken fortitude, which the Gospel reports his followers to have displayed, we have a fresh argument for the certainty of a future life; which, by the further consideration of the time, when these principles first manifested themselves, becomes irresistible. Men, timid and irresolute---who, but just before, all forsook their master and fled---who were

incredulous, and laboured under every prejudice common to their countrymen---who lately joined in one general cry of despondency, “ we *trusted* it had been he, who should have redeemed Israel.”---These men, immediately after the death of their Lord---the very period, when one would expect to find them most deprest, on a sudden, become firm, resolute and intrepid. The resurrection of their master inspired them with a courage, which no menaces could intimidate, and no persecutions subdue. They boldly preached a crucified and risen Saviour; and inferred the consequences of it in terms so forcible, as made their very judges tremble. As persecutions multiplied, their courage encreased. “ Neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor the sword were able to separate them from the love of Christ.”

WE have seen then that the Gospel, by a revelation of certain points, which human

reason neither did nor could discover, has explained the *nature* of immortality: we have seen, moreover, that, by the same means, it has prescribed the *terms* of it; and lastly we have seen, that it has established the *certainty* of it. Thus far our enquiry has been conducted with a view only to the sentiments of the *Heathens* respecting immortality. It remains to be considered in what sense the assertion of "life and immortality brought to light through the Gospel," is true as applied to the *Jews*; who, as they had been favoured with a prior revelation, might be expected on a subject so interesting, to be possessed of fuller information.

THE first question which occurs in entering upon this enquiry, is, Did the law of Moses hold out the promise of a future life? To enter into an examination of every text, which may be cited in support of either side this question, would be incompatible with the nature of the present undertaking. All that

an essay of this nature can pretend to, is, to state *general* arguments, and from the spirit and genius of the Jewish dispensation, to collect the probable extent of its commission.

ONE trait of the nature of the Mosaic law is concisely, but accurately, defined by St. Paul. It was, as he observes, the * “ministration of death;” since our first parents entailed a curse upon their posterity, which the law of Moses, instead of removing, tacitly confirmed. This truth, to which the Mosaic history bears testimony in the *Old Testament*, is corroborated by the concurrent language of the *New*. But, to what purpose was the law a “ministration of death,” if a reprieve passed with the sentence to emancipate the delinquents from the fears of its operation. If the death of Christ had (as no doubt it had) a retrospective effect as far back as the creation; the only title which the law has to the

* 2 Cor. iii. 7.

character of "the ministration of death," must result from with-holding the hopes of a deliverance from the death which it denounced. This interpretation agrees strictly with the sentiments of the Apostle, when he represents those, who lived under the law, to have been, * "through fear of death, all their life time subject to bondage." And, indeed, unless the Gospel were the "*bringing in of a better hope*," it would be difficult to shew, that those under the law were not on an equal footing with those, who had "entered into a *better covenant*, established upon *better promises*."

ANOTHER trait of the Mosaic dispensation, is, that it was *typical* of the Christian. "The law was only a *shadow* of good things to come, the *body* was of Christ." But to what end was the law typical, if it openly promulged what it was its design only darkly to adumbrate? The use of typical representation

* Heb. ii. 15.

implies a design of secreting from vulgar apprehension a knowledge of the antitype. St. Paul speaks to this purpose, when he says, that " Moses put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished." The things, which are abolished, are the carnal covers of the old dispensation, under which were represented the spiritual blessings of the new; and it was the intention of Moses, though he prefigured the latter by the symbolic intervention of the former, at the same time to *conceal*, in great measure, the spiritual meaning under the carnal representation. This is evident from the uniform practice of the New Testament, whose object being perspicuity, its promises are not wrapped up in mystical allusion, but expressed with openness and precision. If this representation be true, life and immortality, which were only *shadowed* out under the law, were left to be *openly displayed* by the Gospel; and thus the veil,

which was spread by Moses, would be done away by Christ.

ANOTHER circumstance in the history of the Jewish polity, equally conclusive to the same point, is the *temporal* sanction of its laws. It is hardly probable that a religion, which constantly denounced, and steadily executed the amplest vengeance in *this* world, should inculcate a reserve of punishment in *another*.

IF an apparent want of discrimination in the distribution of temporal *blessings*, be made an argument *for* a future retribution; the steady administration of temporal *justice*, is as good an argument *against* it: And, as the characteristic difference of the two dispensations consisted in the two different methods, which they proposed, of compensating the merit of those, who lived under them, it may be presumed, that the intervention of the one, was studiously contrived to exclude the knowledge,

and supply the defect of the other. This presumption is strengthened by considering, that the involving an innocent posterity in the consequences of their parents crimes, was a peculiarity of the Mosaic dispensation, which *Jeremiah expressly foretells should be abolished upon entering into the New, or Christian Covenant; and which, therefore, seems to have been intended as a succedaneum for the doctrine of a future retribution under the Old.

FROM the above arguments, it should seem reasonable to conclude, (and the conclusion comes recommended by the concurrence of the † ablest Commentators) that the doctrine of a future state did not make part of the *popular* religion of the early Jews.

HAD they, then, it may be asked, no expectation of a future state? yes: Doubtless

* xxxi. 29, 30.

† Grotius. Episcopus. &c.

they had their hopes and fears, in common with the rest of the world ; but with this difference, that the popular mythology of the latter, flattered hope ; while the religious faith of the former, must have rather excited fear. The sentence passed upon Adam still sounded in the ears of his posterity, and the silence of their inspired law-giver must have been interpreted into an alarming symptom of its intended execution.

NOR is it a refutation of what has been advanced, that the Old Testament foretells a Messiah, who was to be a mediator between God and Man. Distinction is to be made between the general idea of a mediator, and the particular idea of the blessings to be expected from his mediation. The § promise of a mediator immediately followed the forfeiture of divine favor, but in what his mediation should consist, was left undetermined.

Indeed the prophecy is enveloped in such a cloud of obscurity, that it must have created a very confused and imperfect expectation of a mediation *generally* considered; and, like most other predictions contained in Scripture, was rather calculated to derive credit on the event by a subsequent application, than to inspire particular hopes antecedently to the fulfillment.

THE first, who were made acquainted with the secret counsels of divine wisdom, were the Fathers and Leaders of the Jewish nation. While life and immortality were presented to the people, folded up in the general doctrine of a Mediator, or concealed under cover of a carnal representation, through which an early Jewish reader could not easily penetrate; *they*, for wise purposes, were instructed to look for more than transitory promises. † Thus

† Our Saviour (John viii. 56.) bears testimony to Abraham having seen his day and rejoiced: and St. Paul (Heb. xi. 19.) shews us in what sense he saw it.

Abraham saw the gracious purposes of Christ's day *εν παραβολη*, or, in an allegorical representation, and rejoiced; and Moses*, at the bush, gave a convincing proof, that he was not ignorant of the distinguishing blessing of our Saviour's mission.

THE next step, in the wisdom of divine providence, was to admit the Jewish *people* to a gradual participation of the counsels, which it had occasionally revealed to a *chosen few*. For this purpose, a race of Prophets was raised up, who successively contributed

* The text, alluded to in the New Testament, has been made the ground of an opinion, that the law of Moses taught the doctrine of a future state. In answer to this it will be sufficient to observe, that, in the judgment of so excellent a critic as the learned Grotius, it was a proof of the reverse: His words are, "In Mosis lege (non dico in veteri Testamento: nam de Prophetis, præsertim posterioribus res longe alia est) æternæ vitæ non fieri mentionem, nisi per umbras, aut rationis consequentiam, certissimum mihi videtur, Christi auctoritate, qui Sadducæos, non verbis directis, sed ratiocinando refellit.

to disclose the hidden mystery of the Gospel. Their intimations were at first faint, but grew clearer as the Christian æra approached. Each succeeding prophecy threw light upon those which had preceeded it, and all concentrated to illustrate the office and character of the person, of whom they had raised an expectation.

THE later Prophets were particularly explicit in their intimations ; and, in concert with their predictions, co-operated a gradual decline of the extraordinary providence. The consequence of this was, that a Messiah began to be more generally expected, and the peculiar blessings of his mission to be more accurately discerned ; though more men even yet anticipated his coming than understood the nature of his kingdom. Christianity was still seen only through the medium of types and prophecies ; and no wonder if the object received a tinge from the medium, through which it was viewed : Hence arose an expect-

tation of a *temporal*, rather than a *spiritual*, Redeemer ; and life and immortality, the spiritualized blessings of the New Covenant, were less the subject of their hopes, than the carnal emblems which represented them under the Old Covenant. At length, the Sun of righteousness arose, and dissipated the mists of Jewish bigotry, and Heathen ignorance. " The grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, was now made manifest by the appearance of him," who fulfilled all the prophecies of the old Testament, gave a substance to all its shadows, and exhibited in his own person an instance of that life and * incorruption, which his Gospel proclaims shall be the happy lot of all true believers. The promises, which " were seen afar off," were performed ; and life and immortality, which Moses, in the law, concealed under temporal allusions, Christ, in his Gospel, exhibited to public view in their spiritual and proper attire.

* ἀφθαρσίαν • 2 Tim. i. 10.

THE result of our enquiry amounts to this: the Gospel has cleared a future state of the difficulties, from which the natural faculties of man were unable to extricate it :---it has divested it of the obscurity, in which the Mo-
saic dispensation still left it:---it has established the *certainty*, of what, in the Heathen ages, was only matter of *conjecture*; and it has revealed *openly*, what, under the Jewish dispensation, was only *darkly adumbrated*.

WE may conclude with observing, that our gratitude ought to be expressed in proportion to the blessing conferred. The magnitude of the latter will be best estimated by the consolation derived from it; and the best method of expressing our gratitude for it, will be by converting to our use the benefits of it. If we be the children of light, let us walk as becomes that character. Our Saviour has revealed to us a future life, which himself procured for us, and the only recompense he demands for it, is, that we co-operate

with him to secure the advantages of it. By conferring on us eternal existence, he has put it in our power to obtain eternal happiness; and we have none to blame but ourselves, if, what he graciously intended for an endless blessing, proves through our own misconduct, an everlasting curse.

18 JA 53

FINIS.

